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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 001111

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

FOR EAP/MLS, DRL

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [VM](#)
SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS UPDATE - PHAM HONG SON

REF: A. HANOI 1071
[1](#)B. HANOI 1093 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR BRIAN AGGELER.
REASONS 1.4 (B/D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Prominent internet dissident Dr. Pham Hong Son believes that the Communist Party is not his enemy but his competitor. Unlike other prominent political activists, he discourages the use of public demonstrations to achieve greater attention to human rights issues. His comparatively restrained approach to political activism allows him to travel freely throughout the country, but he still is prohibited from working and from traveling overseas. Although he has been accepted to participate in an upcoming NED fellowship, he isn't hopeful that he'll be able to receive a passport in order to travel. END SUMMARY.

"The Communist Party is Not My Enemy"

[1](#)2. (C) Meeting at his home September 16, prominent dissident Dr. Pham Hong Son told Poloff that close contacts within the Communist Party inform him that the struggle between hardliners and more reform-minded individuals continues. While the recent arrest of dissidents affiliated with Bloc 8406 (ref. A) shows a negative trend in the government's treatment of human rights issues, Dr. Son insisted that he remains optimistic. Taking what he described as a more realistic approach to human rights advocacy, Dr. Son explained that he had long discouraged public protests, and instead urged dissidents to advocate broad-based civil reform as a challenge to Communist Party control. "The Communist Party is not my enemy, it is my competitor," he commented.

[1](#)3. (C) As an example, Dr. Son pointed to differences with recently jailed land rights protestor Le Thi Kim Thu. Dr. Son said that in his many meetings with her, he had encouraged Kim -- and others -- to ratchet down their public protests, arguing that it would only lead to their arrest. Dr. Son said that Thu had replied that some things are worth going to jail.

[1](#)4. (C) Dr. Son did, however, voice support for the large-scale prayer vigils at the Thai Ha parish (ref. B). He insisted while he himself is not religious, dissidents of all religious affiliations, including those who are not religious, feel kinship with the Catholics. Dr. Son highlighted the fact that the government had not yet sought to quash the prayer vigils, noting that it was extremely rare for large-scale demonstrations to continue unchallenged.

Unable to Work and Unlikely to Travel Overseas

¶5. (C) While he previously worked for a pharmaceutical company and international medical services company, Dr. Son is prohibited from working while his administrative detention remains in effect. Son is hopeful that once his administrative detention expires on August 30, 2009, the government will allow him to once again find employment.

¶6. (C) Dr. Son noted that while he is able to travel freely within Vietnam, he cannot travel overseas. Dr. Son has been invited to participate in an NED/DRL funded Reagan-Fascell Fellowship beginning in October, but has not yet applied for a passport. He said that he asked MPS whether his application would be approved, but has not received an answer. Dr. Son said that until he receives a positive response from the MPS, there is no use in applying, since his application would surely be denied. He said that he is not optimistic that he will be able to travel overseas this year. (Note: At Dr. Son's request, we are making inquiries with the MPS. End note.)

Background on Pham Hong Son

¶7. (C) Affiliated with the Democratic Party of Vietnam, Dr. Pham Hong Son was jailed from 2002 to 2006 for translating into Vietnamese a State Department website article entitled "What is Democracy" and disseminating it to the GVN. He is currently under administrative detention -- often referred to as house arrest -- through August 2009. Dr. Son has met with the Ambassador, A/S Kramer, U.S. Embassy staff, and a number of other foreign diplomats since his release in 2006. He is married and has two boys,

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ages 11 and 9. His wife, Vu Thuy Ha, works at the French language and cultural center in Hanoi. She was scheduled to attend a luncheon with CODEL Sanchez last year but was prohibited from attending by MPS. While Dr. Son is currently not allowed to work, his family lives quite comfortably in a large three-story home in downtown Hanoi.

MICHALAK